



August 31, 2020

The Honorable Representative Rafael Anchia, Chair
Texas House of Representatives Committee on International Relations & Economic
Development
Room E2.118
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

Via electronic mail to jeff.madden_hc@house.texas.gov

RE: Interim Charge 5: Review the connection between the economic vitality of business and industry and the economic vitality of our military veterans transitioning into the workforce. Specifically, the committee should analyze barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the effectiveness of government transition and training benefits, and current and ongoing demand for veteran and military spouse employment from industry in Texas.

Dear Chair Anchia and Committee Members:

Thank you for giving the County of El Paso the opportunity to respond to the Committee on International Relations & Economic Development's interim charges.

The County of El Paso is fortunate to be the home of the 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss, housing over 30,000 active duty service members and over 100,000 family members. In the last decade, several nonprofit organizations and municipalities have taken aggressive steps to provide services aimed at improving quality of life, access to education, spousal employment opportunities and increasing the retention rate of transitioning service members by attracting and retaining quality employment. Transitioning service members have proven to be critical assets in the civilian workforce as they provide a unique set of skills and leadership.

However, in order to fully capitalize on those sets of skills, it is important to continue providing programs for continuing education like the Hazlewood Act, which provides qualified veterans (and spouses and dependent children) with up to 150 hours of tuition exemption at Texas colleges and universities, and exploring the implementation of a state sponsored program like the U.S. Army Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) program, which connects military members with public and private sector employers.

Launching a state version of the PaYS program would allow the Army to create partnerships with a cross section of private industry, academia, businesses and state and local public institutions, urging partners to sign an agreement to provide job interviews and potential employment to separating soldiers. The incentive for these kinds of partnerships is that the government entity covers any and all training expenses through grants, resulting in substantial savings for employers.

In addition to providing incentives to employers, the state of Texas must continue supporting the aggressive steps taken in easing the regulatory process for transferring out-of-state certifications for military spouses. As the state continues to support military spouse certifications, it is important to include transferring service members and make sure that higher education entities provide programs for transferable certifications. Providing access to post-secondary education, creating additional incentive programs for employers and providing regulatory flexibility for out-of-state certifications will ensure that the state of Texas continues to tear down the barriers faced by veterans, transitioning service members and spouses.

Finally, we refer the Committee to a veteran needs assessment, released this year and commissioned by the County and City of El Paso, El Paso Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders, which speaks to several economic barriers and challenges faced by transitioning service members in our region. The County, its veterans advisory board, and area partners are working to identify solutions and best practices to address the issues raised in the needs assessment so that we can make El Paso the greatest community in Texas for military veterans and their families. The needs assessment may be found at <https://bit.ly/32KcimD>.

Thank you again for this opportunity to offer comments on the Committee's charges. Please do not hesitate to contact the County should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D F Collins", is positioned above the typed name and title.

Daniel F. Collins
Governmental Affairs Manager
County of El Paso, Texas
500 E. San Antonio Ave., Room 311
El Paso, Texas 79901
dcollins@epcounty.com
915.546.2215